



# News Release

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## **Protect against West Nile virus by removing mosquito habitat**

*Monitoring of dead birds and mosquito samples begins*

**OLYMPIA** — A few warm days and mosquitoes make their presence known. Our wet spring has created lots of [habitat for breeding mosquitoes](http://doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/MosquitoTips.html) (<http://doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/MosquitoTips.html>). Avoiding mosquito bites and removing items that can become mosquito habitat is your best defense against West Nile virus.

“With all the rain we’ve had this spring, it’s important to empty stagnant water in flower pots, cans, old tires, buckets, or toys,” said Maryanne Guichard, assistant secretary for the state Department of Health’s environmental health division. “Don’t give mosquito larvae a place to call home.”

Change water in birdbaths, animal troughs, and wading pools twice a week. Inspect windows and doors to make sure they’re “bug tight” — and repair screens as needed.

Staying indoors during dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active can help you avoid mosquito bites. Wearing long sleeves and long pants outdoors during these times is also good protection. Use an [effective mosquito repellent](http://cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/qa/insect_repellent.htm) ([http://cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/qa/insect\\_repellent.htm](http://cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/qa/insect_repellent.htm)) on exposed skin to [keep mosquitoes away](http://doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/WNVQA2.html#effective-repellent) (<http://doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/WNVQA2.html#effective-repellent>). Be very careful when using repellent on children. Read the label and always follow the instructions.

West Nile virus can infect birds, horses and other mammals, and people. Two people in Washington contracted West Nile virus last summer. A Grant County resident likely acquired the illness in our state and a Chelan County resident was infected while traveling out of state. Grant County had the most positive tests for West Nile virus in 2010. The virus was detected in two dead birds and nearly 130 mosquito samples from Grant, Yakima, and Benton Counties. No

horses tested positive for the virus in our state last year. Vaccines and an annual booster can protect horses. Horse owners should contact a veterinarian to learn about vaccinating their horses.

The virus is spread by infected mosquitoes. Most people bitten by an infected mosquito won't have any symptoms. Some may develop mild symptoms, such as fever or headache that go away without treatment. People with weak immune systems and those over 50 years old are more likely to develop serious illness. In some cases, people may develop meningitis or encephalitis; some neurological effects can be permanent.

Department of Health asks people to report dead birds using the agency's [dead bird reporting](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html) (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html) system, or by contacting their [local health agency](http://www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm). Dead bird reporting is encouraged from May through November. Crows, ravens, jays, magpies, and hawks are particularly important to report because they often die from West Nile virus infection. The information helps state and local health agencies identify unusual increases or clusters of bird deaths. Knowing these areas helps with prevention and control strategies — it shows where people might be at higher risk of West Nile virus infection.

More information is available on the agency's West Nile virus information line, 1-866-78-VIRUS (1-866-788-4787) and on the [West Nile virus website](http://doh.wa.gov/WNV) (http://doh.wa.gov/WNV). Updates are also posted on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/WA_DeptofHealth) (http://twitter.com/WA\_DeptofHealth).

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